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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000354

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: GOT AND TURKMEN RAISE GRIEVANCES OVER KIRKUK

REF: BAGHDAD 144

Classified By: PolMil Counselor Timothy A. Betts for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Concern about the supplemental registration process now underway in Kirkuk prompted the Iraqi Turkmen Front's Ankara representative to issue a statement threatening that the ITF would "review" its participation in Iraqi elections if it saw evidence of widespread fraud in the process. He told us that the ITF and other parties in Iraq--including, he claimed, PM Allawi's--issued a similar statement in Kirkuk. Other Iraqi Turkmen and MFA contacts cited similar concerns about pre-election developments in Kirkuk. We encouraged our Turkmen interlocutors to participate. End summary.

2. (C) Prior to MFA Undersecretary Tuygan's January 18 discussion of Iraq with the Ambassador (septel), MFA officials and two ostensibly separate Turkmen groups in Ankara raised their concerns with us over reports that the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) plans to register approximately 70,000 additional Kurds for the Jan. 30 elections.

3. (U) On Jan. 13, the Iraqi Turkmen Front Representative in Ankara, Ahmet Muratli, released a statement expressing concern over what it said were plans over the coming days to register 72,000 Kurds to vote in the election. The statement said there was no way the IECI could verify the bona fides of these people in such a short time. The statement went on to say that if the ITF saw evidence of significant fraud in the election process in Kirkuk, it would "review" its own participation in the elections.

4. (C) PolMilOff spoke to Muratli on Jan. 14. Muratli reported that he had released the statement based on one released in Kirkuk by ITF and 18 other parties, including, he said, PM Allawi's. Muratli characterized the Kirkuk statement as essentially the same as his own. He said that the parties wanted the IECI to have additional time to review the supplemental registration process (see reftel). He urged the U.S. to work with the IECI to "learn the real facts" about "mass Kurdish migration" into Kirkuk and what he characterized as Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Talabani and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) chief Barzani's intimidation and pressure on the former Kirkuk IECI chief, who reportedly refused to register Kurds who came to Kirkuk after April 2003. PolMilOff responded that our Embassy in Baghdad and REO Kirkuk were following the situation closely, that the IECI had established procedures in place to ensure fair registration and voting, and that we were encouraging everyone of goodwill to participate in the elections and in building the new Iraq. To pull out of the election would guarantee that the party would lose, not just in the election but afterwards. Finally, under Article 58 of the TAL the Iraqi Transitional Government is responsible for dealing with the injustices perpetrated by Saddam in Kirkuk, a process independent of who wins the governorate council election there.

5. (C) Muratli took the point, and said "hopefully our administration in Iraq will have cooler heads." He said the ITF wants a successful election and that the party will continue to support the democratic process. Muratli reiterated his familiar mantra that the ITF "never caused problems for the U.S." in Iraq, that the KDP and PUK were seeking to dominate Kirkuk at the expense of Iraq's Turkmen, and that the Turkmen are always asked "to be the understanding ones."

6. (C) PolMilOff met separately Jan. 17 with representatives of the Iraqi Turkmen Culture and Cooperation Society in Ankara. The president, Mahmut Kasapoglu, said the organization--established in 1959--is apolitical and assists Iraqi Turkmen both in Iraq and those who have settled in Turkey. A Society member, Afsin Hurmuzlu, told us that that he had just returned from six months in Kirkuk. He expressed concern over the supplemental registration process, and said a number of the Kurds who have recently moved into Kirkuk are from Iran, not Iraq. He expressed disappointment that the TAL does not recognize Iraq's Turkmen. (NOTE: Not true: Article 9 guarantees the right of Iraqis to educate their children in Turkmen and other languages, though Arabic and Kurdish are the country's official languages. END NOTE.) Though he praised U.S. efforts to deal with the situation

there fairly, he said the perception among many Turkmen is that the U.S. favors Iraq's Kurds.

17. (C) MFA Head of Department Avni Bostali told PolMilOff Jan. 14 that the GOT continues to watch Kirkuk closely, and cited reports that since April 2003 370,000 Kurds (sic) have moved into Kirkuk, and that the Kurdish parties have distributed 50,000 fake PDS cards in order for Kurds not originally from Kirkuk to register to vote there. He added that he has also heard reports that Peshmerga have forced Al-Hadid Arab tribal members from their homes near Kirkuk so that Kurds can move in. When PolMilOff pressed Botsali for further information on these reports, Botsali acknowledged that they were unconfirmed but said he would seek confirmation.

18. (C) Comment: Turks (and Turkmen) have long harbored concerns about Kurdish intentions toward Kirkuk and the potential for ethnic conflict in the city. These concerns have heightened as election day approaches. We will continue to urge all parties to support the greatest possible participation in the elections. End comment.

19. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
EDELMAN